

Message Text

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53

ACTION NEA-16

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-07 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-03 SS-20

USIA-15 AID-20 PC-04 OPR-02 NIC-01 OMB-01 DRC-01 /120 W

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R 091150Z MAY 74

FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0966

C O N F I D E N T I A L COLOMBO 1289

E.O. 11652 GDS

TAGS:

SUBJ: MEETING WITH PRIME MINISTER: INTERNAL POLITICAL
SITUATION AND ALLEGATIONS OF US INVOLVEMENT

BEGIN SUMMARY: PRIME MINISTER TOLD AMBASSADOR SHE HAD NO ALTERNATIVE BUT TO INVOKE RECENT EMERGENCY REGULATIONS AGAINST OPPOSITION IN ORDER TO AVOID POSSIBLE OUTBREAK OF VIOLENCE. MILITANTS WITHIN OPPOSITION UNITED NATIONAL PARTY (UNP) WERE PREPARING FOR ILLEGAL ACTIVITIES WHICH, IN TURN, WOULD HAVE LED TO CONFRONTATION WITH YOUNGER ELEMENTS IN HER OWN UNITED FRONT COALITION. PRIME MINISTER SAID SHE WAS STILL COMMITTED TO DEMOCRATIC PROCESS, CONSIDERED MAY 8 PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE HELPED EASE SITUATION SOMEWHAT, AND WAS PREPARED TO LIBERALIZE EMERGENCY REGULATIONS PROVIDING UNP ADHERED TO LEGAL NORMS. AMBASSADOR EXPRESSED CONCERN OVER SOME ALLEGATIONS UNITED STATES SUPPORTED UNP AND THAT CIA WAS INVOLVED. HE DENIED SUCH REPORTS, STATED USG PLANNED TO CONTINUE TO DEAL ON GOVERNMENT-TO-GOVERNMENT BASIS AND REAFFIRMED OUR BILATERAL RELATIONS WERE GOOD. HOWEVER, EXPLAINED THAT EMBASSY, AS PART OF ITS LEGITIMATE FUNCTIONS, CONFIDENTIAL

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PLANNED TO MAINTAIN NORMAL CONTACT WITH MEM-

BERS OF OPPOSITION. END SUMMARY.

1. I CALLED ON PRIME MINISTER BANDARANAIKE AT 9:30 A.M. MAY 9 AT HER REPUBLIC SQUARE OFFICE. MEETING WAS RESCHEDULED AT MY SUGGESTION BECAUSE PREVIOUS EVENING PM HAD BEEN INVOLVED IN MAJOR DEBATE IN PARLIAMENT OVER GOVERNMENT'S EMERGENCY REGULATIONS LIMITING OPPOSITION ACTIVITIES.

2. I BEGAN CONVERSATION BY TELLING PRIME MINISTER THAT, AS USUAL, SHE APPEARED CALM AND COMPOSED DESPITE RECENT RISE IN POLITICAL TENSIONS. I ADDED MY PERSONAL OBSERVATION THAT PREVIOUS DAY'S DEBATE, WHICH HAD BEEN FULLY REPORTED IN DAILY NEWS, SEEMED TO HAVE HELPED EASE SITUATION, AT LEAST IN SHORT RUN.

3. PRIME MINISTER AGREED DEBATE HAD HELPED TEMPORARILY TO CALM POLITICAL TEMPERS, NOTING IT HAD GIVEN OPPORTUNITY TO BOTH UNITED FRONT AND OPPOSITION MEMBERS TO LET OFF STEAM. IT WAS FOR THIS REASON, AND TO SHOW THAT DEMOCRACY STILL PREVAILED IN SRI LANKA, THAT SHE HAD IMMEDIATELY AGREED TO OPPOSITION LEADER J.R. JAYEWARDENE'S DEMAND FOR A DEBATE. HOWEVER, IT APPEARED THAT UNP AND OTHER OPPOSITION ELEMENTS WERE REGROUPING AND THEIR FUTURE TACTICS STILL UNCLEAR.

4. PRIME MINISTER EXPLAINED SHE HAD NOT WANTED TO TAKE EMERGENCY ACTIONS ON APRIL 20-21. SHE HAD FELT COMPELLED TO DO SO BECAUSE OF TENSE ATMOSPHERE THROUGHOUT COUNTRY AND POSSIBILITY OF VIOLENCE AND BLOODSHED. HER HUSBAND HAD BEEN CRITICIZED FOR FAILING TO INVOKE EMERGENCY POWERS SOON ENOUGH DURING 1958 COMMUNAL RIOTS AND THERE WERE SOME WHO SAID SHE SHOULD HAVE USED SUCH POWERS MORE QUICKLY DURING 1971 INSURGENCY. PROBLEM WAS THAT J.R. CONFIDENTIAL

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JAYEWARDENE NO LONGER HAD FULL CONTROL OF OPPOSITION POSTURE BY YOUNGER MEMBERS OF UNITED NATIONAL PARTY (UNP). UNDER THEIR PRESSURE, JAYEWARDENE WAS THREATENING TO TAKE OVER FOOD DEPOTS, IMPEDE POLICE, AND INTERFERE WITH GOVERNMENT ACTIVITIES. THESE OPPOSITION TACTICS HAD STIMULATED COUNTER EFFORTS AMONG YOUNGER MEMBERS OF UNITED FRONT

WHO, IN TURN, WERE ANOIJADFOR DIRECT CONFRONTATION WITH OPPOSITION. IF THIS HAD OCCURRED, THERE WAS EVEN PROSPECT "CIVIL WAR" MIGHT HAVE ENSUED AND IT WAS TO AVOID THIS PROSPECT THAT SHE HAD RELUCTANTLY DECIDED TO CURB OPPOSITION.

5. PRIME MINISTER SAID SHE REALIZED EMERGENCY MEASURES WERE ADVERSELY AFFECTING SRI LANKA'S INTERNATIONAL IMAGE. CURFEW AND RELATED EMERGENCY MEASURES HAD ALREADY AFFECTED TOURISM BECAUSE SEVERAL GROUPS HAD CANCELLED VISITS TO SRI LANKA AND THERE WAS ALSO PROPOSAL BY UNP TO CANCEL CONFERENCE OF COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARIANS SCHEDULED FOR COLOMBO IN EARLY SEPT. AS SHE HAD PREVIOUSLY STATED, AND REPEATED IN RECENT DEBATE, SHE WAS PREPARED TO RELAX THESE MEASURES AGAINST BOTH UNP AND DAWASA (SUN) NEWSPAPER GROUP, PROVIDED THEY CAVED ILLEGAL ACTIVITIES.

6. I TOLD PRIME MINISTER THAT WHILE I DID NOT PRESUME TO INVOLVE MYSELF IN INTERNAL POLITICAL PROBLEMS, I WAS PLEASED TO HEAR HER RECOMMITMENT TO DEMOCRATIC PROCESS WHICH HAD BEEN SUCH AN IMPORTANT TRADITION IN SRI LANKA AND WHICH WAS A COMMON BOND BETWEEN SRI LANKA AND UNITED STATES. ONE REASON I HAD ASKED TO SEE HER WAS BECAUSE I HAD BEEN CONCERNED ABOUT SEVERAL RECENT ATTACKS ON UNITED STATES, PRIMARILY IN RADICAL PRESS. THESE ATTACKS TOOK THE FORM OF CHARGES UNITED STATES WAS SUPPORTING UNITED NATIONAL CONFIDENTIAL

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PARTY AND THAT CIA WAS AN INSTRUMENT OF THIS SUPPORT. I ALSO NOTED THAT THERE HAD BEEN RECENT REVIVAL OF STORIES ABOUT CHILE WITH INFERENCE US WAS INVOLVED IN CHILE AND THEREFORE WAS INVOLVED HERE.

7. I WENT ON TO SAY THAT PRESENT RELATIONS BETWEEN OUR TWO GOVTS WERE GOOD AND I SAW NO REASON THEY SHOULD NOT CONTINUE TO BE GOOD. I WANTED HER TO KNOW UNEQUIVOCALLY THAT THE US DID NOT SUPPORT THE UNITED NATIONAL PARTY. AS THE AMB RESPONSIBLE FOR ALL OFFICIAL AMERICAN ACTIVITIES IN SRI LANKA, I ALSO WANTED HER TO KNOW THAT ANY ALLEGATIONS ABOUT CIA INVOLVEMENT

WERE BASELESS. IF SHE EVER HAD DOUBTS ON THIS SCORE, I HOPED SHE WOULD GET IN TOUCH WITH ME IMMEDIATELY SO THAT WE COULD TALK OVER ANY PROBLEMS.

8. I TOLD PRIME MINISTER THAT, ON MY PART, I HAD DISCUSSED THIS MATTER EARLIER SAME WEEK AT PRIVATE LUNCH AT MY RESIDENCE WITH HER SON-IN-LAW, KUMAR RUPASINGHE, BECAUSE SEVERAL ALLEGATIONS AGAINST UNITED STATES HAD APPEARED RECENTLY IN JANAVEGAYA, WHICH RUPASINGHE EDITED. (PRIME MINISTER INTERJECTED SHE DID NOT READ JANAVEGAYA.) I HAD ALSO TAKEN OPPORTUNITY TO NOTE MY CONCERN TO LSSP LEADER, COLVIN DE SILVA, BECAUSE SOME OF THESE ATTACKS HAD APPEARED IN LSSP WEEKLY, THE NATION. IN TIME OF INTERNAL STRESS, THERE WAS OFTEN TENDENCY OF POLITICIANS AND PRESS TO LASH OUT AT FOREIGN DEVILS AND, WITH THIS IN MIND, I WANTED PRIME MINISTER AND OTHER MEMBERS OF HER GOVT TO KNOW THAT I DID NOT WANT SITUATION TO GET OUT OF HAND.

9. PRIME MINISTER EXPRESSED APPRECIATION FOR MY ASSURANCES. SHE, TOO, HAD BEEN SOME-CONFIDENTIAL

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WHAT CONCERNED ABOUT POSSIBILITY CURRENT SITUATION WOULD OFFER AN OPPORTUNITY FOR CERTAIN INDIVIDUALS TO ATTACK US. FOR EXAMPLE, SHE HAD BEEN CONCERNED BECAUSE MEMBER OF UNITED FRONT HAD MADE SUCH AN ATTACK DURING PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE, BUT SHE ADDED QUICKLY THAT HE WAS A COMMUNIST (ACTING MINISTER OF EDUCATION TUDAWAWE). SHE RECALLED THAT SIMILAR ALLEGATIONS OF FOREIGN INVOLVEMENT, INCLUDING INVOLVEMENT OF SOVIETS, CHINESE, NORTH KOREANS, AND OTHERS HAD BEEN RAISED DURING 1971 INSURGENCY AND SAID SHE WOULD KEEP HER EYE ON CURRENT SITUATION. PROBLEM WAS THAT UNP WAS REGARDED AS CONSERVATIVE PARTY AND THERE WAS GENERAL ASSUMPTION UNITED STATES WOULD SUPPORT CONSERVATIVE GROUPS.

10. AS THIS PARTY OF CONVERSATION CONCLUDED, I EXPLAINED TO PRIME MINISTER WHEN I HAD SAID US DID NOT SUPPORT UNP, THIS DID NOT MEAN THAT MEMBERS OF AMERICAN

EMBASSY HAD NOT KEPT IN TOUCH
WITH MEMBERS OF OPPOSITION. I CONSIDERED
THIS NORMAL AND LEGITIMATE ROLE OF EMBASSY
JUST AS I EXPECTED AMB NEVILLE KAN-
AKARATNE WAS KEEPING IN TOUCH WITH DEMOCRATS
IN WASHINGTON. I PERSONALLY HAD NOT SEEN
J.R. JAYEWARDENE RECENTLY BUT HAD SEEN
HIM IN PAST AND I KNEW
SHE WOULD UNDERSTAND THAT IT WAS PART OF
MY JOB TO KEEP IN TOUCH WITH HIM IN THE
FUTURE AS PART OF EMBASSYS OVER-ALL TASK
OF MAINTAINING SOME CONTACT WITH
ALL POLITICAL LEADERS.
VAN HOLLEN

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: ANTIAMERICAN, INTERVENTION, PRESS COMMENTS, DIPLOMATIC DISCUSSIONS, OPPOSITION PARTIES, EXTREMISTS, POLICE POWERS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 09 MAY 1974
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: garlanwa
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1974COLOMB01289
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D740113-0368
From: COLOMBO
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1974/newtext/t19740562/aaaacdde.tel
Line Count: 237
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 5
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: garlanwa
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 24 SEP 2002
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <24 SEP 2002 by boyleja>; APPROVED <10 JAN 2003 by garlanwa>
Review Markings:

Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
30 JUN 2005

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: MEETING WITH PRIME MINISTER: INTERNAL POLITICAL SITUATION AND ALLEGATIONS OF US INVOLVEMENT
TAGS: PFOR, PINS, CE, CIA, (BANDARANAIKE, SIRIMAVO)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005